



AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

1.(currently amended) A process for producing (meth)acrylic acid, comprising:  
contacting a reaction gas containing (meth)acrylic acid obtained by gas-phase catalytic oxidation, with an absorbent solvent to prepare a (meth)acrylic acid solution; and

introducing the (meth)acrylic acid solution into a distillation column to purify the (meth)acrylic acid,

~~after adjusting wherein~~ a dissolved oxygen concentration in the (meth)acrylic acid solution to be introduced into the distillation column is adjusted to not less than 12 ppm by weight, before the (meth)acrylic acid solution ~~being~~is fed to the distillation column.

2.(original) A process according to claim 1, wherein the (meth)acrylic acid solution to be introduced into the distillation column is mixed with oxygen or an oxygen-containing gas to adjust the dissolved oxygen concentration in the (meth)acrylic acid solution.

3.(cancelled).

4.(original) A process according to claim 2, wherein the (meth)acrylic acid solution to be introduced into the distillation column is mixed with oxygen or an oxygen-containing gas, subjected to a gas-liquid separation, and then introduced into the distillation column.

5.(previously presented) A process according to claim 2, wherein the mixing of the (meth)acrylic acid solution with oxygen or the oxygen-containing gas is performed in a conduit for introducing the (meth)acrylic acid solution into the distillation column, or a static mixer or an orifice disposed in the conduit.

6.(previously presented) A process according to claim 4, wherein a means for the gas-liquid separation is a gas-liquid separation tank equipped with a pressure controlling apparatus.

7.(previously presented) A process according to claim 1, wherein the dissolved oxygen concentration in the (meth)acrylic acid solution is adjusted in a facility disposed on an upstream side of the distillation column.

8.(previously presented) A process according to claim 1, wherein the (meth)acrylic acid solution is in the form of an aqueous solution, the distillation column is an azeotropic dehydration distillation column, and at least a part of a phenol-based polymerization inhibitor is fed to the azeotropic dehydration distillation column from a raw material feed stage thereof or a position higher than the raw material feed stage, and a copper-based polymerization inhibitor is fed to the azeotropic dehydration column from a position lower than the raw material feed stage.

9.(original) A process according to claim 8, wherein the azeotropic dehydration column is any of a perforated plate column, a packed column and a combination of a perforated plate column and a packed column.

10.(withdrawn) A process for producing (meth)acrylic acid, comprising:  
subjecting propane, propylene, isobutylene or t-butanol to gas-phase catalytic oxidation;  
contacting the obtained oxidation reaction mixture with water to prepare an aqueous (meth)acrylic acid solution; and

subjecting the aqueous (meth)acrylic acid solution to azeotropic dehydration distillation in the presence of an azeotropic agent,

upon the azeotropic dehydration distillation, a phenol-based polymerization inhibitor being fed to an azeotropic dehydration distillation column from a position not lower than a raw material feed stage thereof, and

a copper-based polymerization inhibitor being fed to the azeotropic dehydration distillation column from a position lower than the raw material feed stage.

11.(withdrawn) A process according to claim 10, wherein the azeotropic dehydration distillation column is any of a perforated plate column, a packed column and a combination of a perforated plate column and a packed column.

12.(withdrawn) A process according to claim 10, wherein the phenol-based polymerization inhibitor is hydroquinone, methoquinone or a mixture thereof.

13.(withdrawn) A process according to claim 10, wherein the copper-based polymerization inhibitor is at least one material selected from the group consisting of copper dithiocarbamate, copper acetate, copper carbonate and copper acrylate.